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HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

44th session

(Item 12)

Statement by Mr. Cristiano Costa

Mr. President,

I am Timorese, and managed to escape from East Timor, leaving behind my country and my family in order to give my testimony on human rights violations (perpetrated) committed by the Indonesian military in East Timor. I escaped from Timor in October 1987, passing through Indonesia, and arrived in Macau on 31 December 1987.

On 7 December 1975 Indonesian forces invaded the city of Dili, and three days later they invaded my home town, Baucau. That day I saw Indonesian paratroopers torture and execute Timorese after capturing them. Others were sent to prisons in Baucau - to the Flamboyant (formerly an hotel) and to the RTP (former base of a Portuguese army company). I was 15-years-old at that time. Faced with this climate of terror I fled into the bush, to the areas controlled by the Timorese resisters.

In 1979, one of my brothers was killed by Indonesian soldiers and I was captured by the Indonesian forces in Ostiko in the Baucau region. Until 1980 I was detained in their Baucau military base.

In 1981 I was forced by the Indonesian military to take part in a military operation carried out by Indonesian forces and known as "Operasi Pagar-Kikis I". The operation, commanded by Colonel Sahala Rajaguguh, mobilised 40 Indonesian battalions and the civilian population of East Timor. During this operation I saw in Aitana, in the Lacluta zone, Indonesian forces pitilessly and mercilessly massacre children, women, old and infirm.

In April 1982, in preparation for the first election imposed on

East Timor by the Indonesian government, the Indonesian military imprisoned a large number of people from the eastern part of Timor. I was also among a group of 324 people arrested and taken to the Taci Tolu zone near Dili. We were released after three months.

In 1983, after the ceasefire agreed between the guerrillas and Indonesian forces, there was another wave of massacres and imprisonments of people who, in occupied towns all over the territory, were suspected of sympathising with Fretilin. So as not to go into other cases of massacres now, I will mention the already known Kraras massacre in which a village of over 2000 people was almost entirely exterminated. It was at this stage that I was re-arrested in Baucau on 18 August 1983 on suspicion of collaborating with Fretilin. I was interrogated and subjected to torture. For 2 weeks in both Baucau and then Dili I suffered electric shocks, beatings, burns and had my teeth broken. I still remember the name of the Indonesian official in Baucau in charge of torture and interrogations - it was Captain A. Haryanto.

On 2 September 1983 I was tied up and, along with 20 other prisoners including my other brother, was sent to the Komarka prison, Dili. Some of my colleagues - Adolfo Fraga, Antônio Espírito Santo,

Benjamin Guterres, Isidoro Ximenes and Carlos Alves - were also arrested in Baucau and later "disappeared".

In the Komarka prison, Dili, we were not allowed visits from relatives; we were not given a normal diet, and received no medical attention. Our conditions only improved on the eve of International Red Cross visits or visits to the prison by foreigners, but as soon as they left, the bad conditions continued.

I was present when Major Mudy called seven prisoners : João C. Belo, Paulo Mesquita, Marcelino Pinto, Afonso, Hélder Araújo, Feliciano (Mau-Siri) and Paulo Rodrigues. They were taken from the prison and "disappeared".

The Timorese non-political prisoners, that is, those prisoners held under common law, were in far better health than we, and were given more privileges. They were the prisoners chosen for interviews or filming. On 4 September 1984, when the Indonesian Foreign (Affairs) Minister, Mr. Mochtar Kusuma-Atmadja, and Timor's Governor, Mr. Mário Carrascalão, visited the prison, it was these common law prisoners who were filmed and interviewed.

Many political prisoners were made to sign false confessions which were then used to stage sham trials. Two Indonesian lawyers from Kupang were

appointed by the court to defend them, but they had no contact with the prisoners. In fact, they worked closely with the prosecutor and the judge to produce guilty verdicts and sentences that had already been decided (upon) by the military. I myself and 49 others refused to sign these false confessions so we were never tried. On 27th April 1985 after 20 months in prison, those of us who had refused to take part in the trials were released. We then had to report every week to the Indonesian military command.

Later on, once I was back in Baucau, I saw many people being arrested on 17 August 1987 by the Indonesian military in reprisal for the attacks carried out by guerrillas in Laisoro-Lai (Quelicai) and in Seiçal (Baucau). These people were interrogated and tortured by Red Berets in the middle of the night in the Flamboyant Hotel, Baucau. The more highly suspect detainees were sent to Dili, where they were kept in the Red Beret prisons.

In January 1988, as a result of my escape, Abel da Costa Ximenes and Joaquim Saldanha, who both worked with me in the Puskud cooperative, as well as my cousin Egas da Costa, a student at the Driarkara Faculty of Philosophy in Jakarta, were arrested and interrogated.

Mr. President,

As long as the Indonesian military continue in East Timor, peace will never be possible in the territory because fear, torture,

interrogations, massacres, rape, arbitrary imprisonment and executions are the constant scourge of the people of East Timor.

Mr President,

I want to end with one of my innermost thoughts. One day in 1983 when I was being badly tortured, I swore to myself that a time would come when I would get out of East Timor and tell the United Nations about my experiences and all the sufferings of my people. Today my dream has come - true.

May I thank you for letting me make this statement. And may I beg you to take action to protect my family in East Timor from any reprisals by the Indonesians because of my appearance here.

Thank you, Mr. President.